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STRENGTHENING OF THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RELIEF ASSISTANCE OF THE UNITED NATIONS, INCLUDING SPECIAL ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE: STRENGTHENING OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND COORDINATION OF EFFORTS TO STUDY, MITIGATE AND MINIMIZE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CHERNOBYL DISASTER

Letter dated 8 April 1996 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I have the honour to refer to General Assembly resolution 50/134, adopted on 20 December 1995, on the strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. In paragraph 2 of the resolution, I was requested to appeal to Member States to continue and intensify their assistance to Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, in support of their ongoi..g efforts to cope with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

I should be grateful if you would bring the attached appeal to the attention of the members of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI

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ANNEX

Appeal to States Members of the United Nations on the tenth anniversary of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant

Ten years separate us from the early-morning hours of 26 April 1986 when two powerful explosions in rapid succession destroyed the Unit 4 reactor of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, exposing the burning core and releasing 50 million curies of radioactive isotopes into the environment.

The scale of the accident, its impact on health and on the ecological situation transcended the boundaries of the zone around Chernobyl, indeed, the boundaries of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, the three countries which received the largest share of the fallout, becoming a global problem of concern to the entire world.

Even a decade later, however, this accident is much more than the worst technological disaster in the history of nuclear power generation; it is also a grave and continuing humanitarian tragedy.

By displacing hundreds of thousands of people, it severely damaged the socio-psychological fibre of the most seriously affected States. Radioactive contamination, health risks, both physical and mental, continue to affect vast populations in these three countries.

That tragic event 10 years ago continues to this day to have a devastating effect on the social and economic life in Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, obliging them to grapple with the most acute of its consequences. Chernobyl, however, represents a long-term problem of unprecedented complexity, which can only be tackled successfully through the combined efforts of the entire international community.

The International Conference, "One Decade after Chernobyl: Summing Up the Consequences of the Accident", held recently at Vienna, fully attested to this fact. Indeed, it brought together nuclear scientists, doctors, political leaders of Member States, organizations of the United Nations system, the European Commission and others for a thorough and detailed assessment of the situation 10 years later, and of the level and adequacy of the assistance provided and research undertaken. The results of the Conference clearly point to the need for intensifying assistance to vast segments of the populations of the affected States, as well as to the need for further research into what is still very much an evolving science.

Recognizing the universal importance of the Chernobyl disaster, the General Assembly at its fiftieth session declared 26 April 1996 to be the International Day Commemorating the Tenth Anniversary of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant Accident. In its resolution 50/134 the General Assembly invites Member States to conduct appropriate activities to commemorate this tragic event and to enhance public awareness of the consequences of such disasters for health and the environment throughout the world.

The United Nations today remains profoundly concerned by the continuing impact of this disaster on the lives and health of large numbers of people, particularly children. I cannot stress enough that Chernobyl is still a major humanitarian tragedy, and that with the passage of time, the suffering has not abated.

In any realistic forecast of the challenges facing the United Nations, we must accept that Chernobyl and its consequences will remain on the international agenda. The occasion of the tenth anniversary of the accident provides us with a special opportunity to express a renewed commitment to help those who are asking for our assistance. It is also a chance to reinforce our common effort to respond to this continuing humanitarian and technological disaster.

As the Secretary-General of the United Nations, I am therefore taking this opportunity to appeal to Member States to continue and to intensify their assistance to Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine, so that a tangible difference can be made in the lives of those still suffering at the hands of the "invisible enemy".

Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI